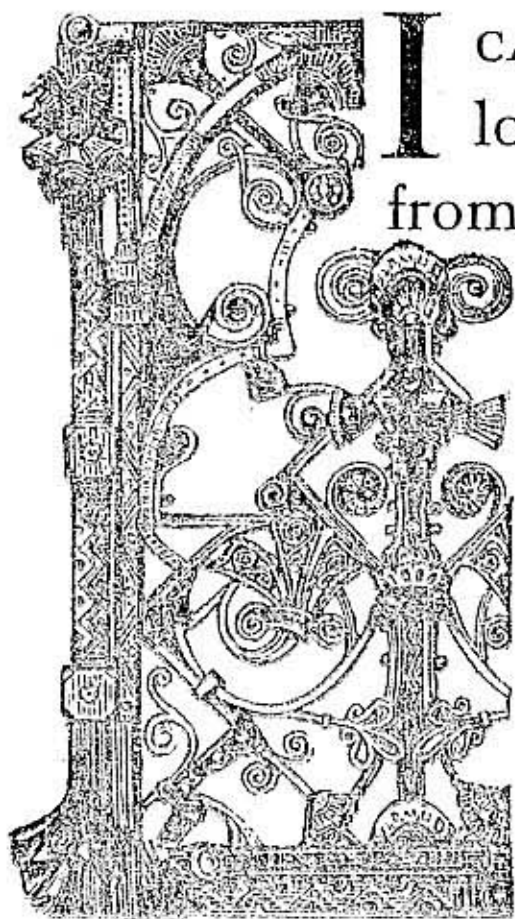


Letter *the* First

Part One

The JOURNEY to RICH BAR

RICH BAR, EAST BRANCH of the NORTH FORK of FEATHER RIVER,
September 13, 1851.



I CAN easily imagine, dear M., the look of large wonder which gleams from your astonished eyes when they fall upon the date of this letter. I can figure to myself your whole surprised attitude as you exclaim, "What, in the name of all that is restless, has sent 'Dame Shirley' to Rich Bar? How did such a shivering, frail, home-loving little thistle ever float safely to that far-away spot, and take root so kindly, as it evidently has, in that barbarous soil? Where, in this living, breathing world of ours, lieth that same Rich Bar, which, sooth to say, hath a most taking name? And, for pity's sake, how does the poor little fool expect to amuse herself there?"

Patience, sister of mine. Your curiosity is truly laudable, and I trust that before you read the postscript of this epistle it will be fully and completely relieved. And, first, I will merely observe, *en passant*, reserving a full description of its discovery for a future letter, that said Bar forms a part of a mining settlement situated on the East Branch of the North Fork of Feather River, "away off up in the mountains," as our "little Faresoul" would say, at almost the highest point where, as yet, gold has been discovered, and indeed within fifty miles of the summit of the Sierra Nevada itself. So much, at present, for our *local*, while I proceed to tell you of the propitious – or unpropitious, as the result will prove – winds which blew us hitherward.

You already know that F., after suffering for an entire year with fever and ague, and bilious, remittent, and intermittent fevers, – this delightful list varied by an occasional attack of jaundice, – was advised, as a *dernier ressort*, to go into the mountains. A friend, who had just returned from the place, suggested Rich Bar as the terminus of his health-seeking journey, not only on account of the extreme purity of the atmosphere, but because there were more than a thousand people

there already, and but one physician, and as his strength increased, he might find in that vicinity a favorable opening for the practice of his profession, which, as the health of his purse was almost as feeble as that of his body, was not a bad idea.

F. was just recovering from a brain-fever when he concluded to go to the mines; but, in spite of his excessive debility, which rendered him liable to chills at any hour of the day or night, he started on the seventh day of June – mounted on a mule, and accompanied by a jackass to carry his baggage, and a friend who kindly volunteered to assist him in spending his money – for this wildly beautiful spot. F. was compelled by sickness to stop several days on the road. He suffered intensely, the trail for many miles being covered to the depth of twelve feet with snow, although it was almost midsummer when he passed over it. He arrived at Rich Bar the latter part of June, and found the revivifying effect of its bracing atmosphere far surpassing his most sanguine hopes. He soon built himself an office, which was a perfect marvel to the miners, from its superior elegance. It is the only one on the Bar, and I intend to visit it in a day or two, when I

will give you a description of its architectural splendors. It will perhaps enlighten you as to one peculiarity of a newly discovered mining district, when I inform you that although there were but two or three physicians at Rich Bar when my husband arrived, in less than three weeks there were *twenty-nine* who had chosen this place for the express purpose of practicing their profession.

Finding his health so almost miraculously improved, F. concluded, should I approve the plan, to spend the winter in the mountains. I had teased him to let me accompany him when he left in June, but he had at that time refused, not daring to subject me to inconveniences, of the extent of which he was himself ignorant. When the letter disclosing his plans for the winter reached me at San Francisco, I was perfectly enchanted. You know that I am a regular nomad in my passion for wandering. Of course my numerous acquaintances in San Francisco raised one universal shout of disapprobation. Some said that I ought to be put into a strait-jacket, for I was undoubtedly mad to think of such a thing. Some said that I should never get there alive, and if I *did*, would not stay a month;

